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Prepared by  
**Food Safety  
and Quality  
Service**

# Food News for Consumers

June 1980

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JUL 18 1980

## USDA's Food Safety and Quality Service:

- Inspects domestic and imported meat, poultry, and meat and poultry products;
- Establishes ingredient standards and approves recipes and labels for processed meat and poultry products;
- Inspects liquid, dried, and frozen egg products;
- Establishes grade standards for fruits, vegetables, meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products, and provides grading services for these foods on request;
- Monitors the food industry for violations of inspection and grading laws; and
- Buys food for the USDA school lunch program and other food assistance programs.

## A Grade By Any Other Name . . .

When consumers go grocery shopping, they can find U.S. Grade AA butter, Grade A eggs, Fancy apples, and Choice beef--all graded by USDA for quality. Although the same grade names are used nationwide for each commodity, the grade names do vary among commodities, and a nationwide consumer survey done for USDA in late 1979 and early 1980 confirmed that the variation in grade names is confusing to consumers. ("Food News for Consumers," Jan. 1980, page 3.)

So USDA grading officials have taken a long look at their grade name policy and, on May 30, published an "advance notice of proposed rulemaking" in the Federal Register. This notice describes options the department is considering for changing its grade names to make them more useful to consumers and asks the public to comment on them.

The options are:

- Adopt a completely uniform grade name policy using U.S. Grades A, B, and C or U.S. Grades AA, A, and B for all graded foods;
- Keep the present system of grade names for meat (Prime, Choice, Good, etc.) and fresh fruits and vegetables (generally, U.S. Fancy, U.S. No. 1, and U.S. No. 2) and use U.S. Grades AA, A, and B or A, B, and C for all other graded foods;
- Retain present grade names but adopt a separate consumer color coding system in which one color would represent each quality level for all graded foods;
- Require grade labeling at the retail level if a product is graded and grade labeled at the wholesale or packer level (such labeling, even when the product has been officially graded at the wholesale level, is now voluntary).

There are several ways to comment on these options, including three public hearings. The first was held in Ames, Iowa, on July 1. Two others are planned:

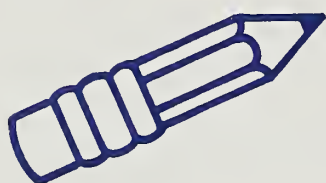
- July 16 from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. at the Multi-Service Senior Center, 330 Fifth St. North, St. Petersburg, Fla. (Spanish translators available); and

THERE'S A  
**GRADE DAY**  
COMING!

**YOUR  
COMMENTS  
COUNT**



## Grade Names continued



•August 7 from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. at the Jack Tar Hotel, 1101 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, Cal.

Both oral and written comments will be accepted at the hearings. To comment orally, send your name and address and the location at which you wish to testify to: Public Participation Staff, Rm. 1168-S, Food Safety and Quality Service, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250, at least two weeks before the date of the hearing at which you want to testify. A portion of each hearing will be conducted with an "open mike," meaning that all those who wish to testify may do so.

You may also present your views by writing directly to USDA (see box below). When writing, give the date and subject of the Federal Register notice (available at public libraries) or mention "food grading policy." Comments should be received no later than August 28.

For more information: Press Release #1140-80 (5-30-80) and "Background on Possible Changes in USDA Grading Policy," available in English and Spanish (June 1980).

## PCB Update



USDA has closed its "PCB Control Center" at Montgomery, Ala., and, in a separate development, three federal agencies issued proposals to remove equipment containing liquid polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) from food, animal feed, pesticide, and fertilizer plants.

The work of the "PCB Center" was successfully completed. It was a cooperative effort to remove meat containing PCB residue from food channels in Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. The effort began Feb. 26 after the residue was confirmed in pork from three northern Alabama farms. An intensive monitoring program at slaughtering facilities failed to turn up any further violative residue levels. The cooperative program--which included participation by USDA and state agricultural agencies in the three southern states--also involved collecting and disposing of steel sheeting which was covered with material containing PCB.

At about the same time the "center" was closed, USDA, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Environmental Protection Agency proposed regulations

### How to Obtain Free Copies

Single free copies of press releases, Federal Register reprints, studies, fact sheets, and publications mentioned in the FSQS section of this newsletter are available from regional information offices across the country (see page 14) or from FSQS Information, Room 3606-S, USDA, Washington, D.C. Phone: (202) 447-5223.

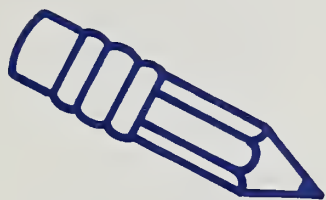
### Where to Send Comments

Send your comments on proposals in the FSQS section to: Regulations Coordination Division, Room 2637-S, FSQS, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250. Usually two copies are requested. Be sure to identify the proposal you are commenting on by referring to the title of informal proposals or, for formal proposals, the date of publication in the Federal Register.

### Tips on Writing Comments

For tips on how to give your comments more weight, write for the FSQS fact sheet called "Public Participation: Getting Involved in FSQS" (March 1980).

## PCB Update continued



in the May 9 Federal Register that, if adopted, will require food, animal feed, pesticide, and fertilizer companies to remove virtually all equipment containing liquid PCB. The agencies' proposals are in response to an industrial accident last summer in which the toxic chemical leaked from a ruptured transformer into the drainage system of a slaughtering plant in Billings, Mont. Animal feed produced from the waste in that system contaminated meat, poultry, and egg products in 19 states.

Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Carol Tucker Foreman said the proposals represent a coordinated effort by the federal agencies responsible for public safety and health to protect consumers from environmental contamination of the food supply.

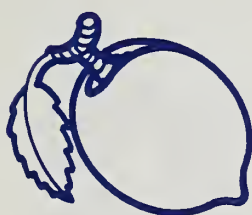
A previous USDA proposal, if adopted, will prohibit the installation of any new or replacement PCB-containing equipment in meat, poultry, and egg products plants. ("Food News for Consumers," May 1980, page 3.)

Comments on USDA's PCB removal proposal are due by Nov. 4, and all comments received will be shared among the three agencies.

For more information: Press Release #970-80 (5-7-80).

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## Peach Crop to Be Surveyed



The USDA will survey this year's peach crop nationwide to find out the extent of broken or shattered pits and other internal defects.

This information will be used to develop a comprehensive screening and sampling plan for the 1981 peach season, according to Assistant Secretary Foreman.

USDA officials decided to make the survey after finding a significant incidence of broken and shattered pits, as well as gum spots, in a sampling of Georgia peaches in June 1978. Department officials had planned to implement a screening plan in 1979, but a June 1979 injunction brought by peach growers halted the effort. Officials say the survey this year will provide the additional data needed to develop an extensive sampling plan which is fair to growers.

Internal defects in peaches, including broken or shattered pits resulting in gum spots, affect the eating quality of the fruit and are factors considered in determining U.S. grades.

For more information: Press Releases #667-80 (3-28-80) and #876-80 (4-25-80).

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## National Effort to Reduce Cancer Incidence



On May 20, Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland announced that USDA plans to play a major role in the national effort to reduce cancer incidence by preventing or minimizing exposure to cancer-causing agents.

"Historically, USDA has conducted research, education, and animal and plant health protection programs in service to the agricultural community," Bergland said. "We will continue to fulfill that responsibility. However, USDA also recognizes its equally important responsibility to the public health."

Through the Interagency Regulatory Liaison Group (IRLG), the federal agencies responsible for carcinogen regulation are developing the criteria for identifying carcinogens and assessing their human risks. USDA's Food Safety and Quality Service is a member of this group.



## Cancer Effort continued

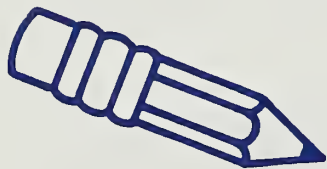
Bergland is establishing a Departmental Carcinogen Policy Group to recommend USDA actions needed to reduce exposure to carcinogens and to facilitate USDA's interagency cooperative effort. The group will be chaired by Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Carol Tucker Foreman, who also currently chairs the IRLG.

In addition to FSQS, other agencies in the USDA group will include the Science and Education Administration, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, the Office of Environmental Quality, and the Office of Safety and Health Management.

For more information: Press Release #1058-80 (5-20-80).

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## New Grades for Canned Fruit Proposed



Grade standards were proposed in the March 21 Federal Register for canned fruit mix, a new product commonly found under generic labels in the supermarket. It usually costs less than fruit cocktail because the expensive artificially-colored ingredients are omitted; more surplus fruit is used; and various forms of fruit, such as slices, dices, and quarters, are included in the product.

Under the proposal, both U.S. Grade A and B fruit mix would have a reasonably bright appearance and be practically free from seeds and pits.

Also included in the proposal is a new grading procedure for canned sweet cherries, fruit cocktail, pears, apricots, and grapes. The new system, attributes sampling, would offer packers better control over the finished product's quality.

Comments on the proposal are due by Dec. 12. For more information: Press Release #614-80 (3-21-80).

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## New Inspection Referral Program

Working  
Together



Four agencies concerned with public safety and health have announced a new inspection referral program to better coordinate investigations.

The USDA, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Food and Drug Administration--members of the Interagency Regulatory Liaison Group (IRLG)--are starting the program to effect quicker identification and removal of serious public health hazards.

The new referral program establishes a formal, standardized procedure for reporting of suspected violations to the agency responsible. Most major industries are visited by inspectors from one or more of the IRLG agencies. Examples of businesses that would be affected by the cooperative inspection program include chemical manufacturing, food processing, drug production, and the manufacturing of various consumer goods.

Inspectors from each of the agencies involved will be trained to recognize possible violations of other agency's regulations. However, a determination that a violation exists will be made only by the agency having the legal jurisdiction over the suspected violation, and then only on the basis of the responsible agency's own follow-up investigation.

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## Modernizing Meat and Poultry Inspection



As part of an ongoing effort to modernize and improve its meat and poultry inspection programs, USDA is testing a new machine that will open poultry carcasses for inspection, thus freeing inspectors from the time-consuming process of positioning the birds. USDA is currently testing the bird opener to see if it enables inspectors to do their jobs more efficiently and allows production lines to move faster while still maintaining consumer protection standards.

Last year, another new poultry inspection procedure--modified traditional inspection--was implemented. This procedure eliminated much of the time inspectors spent positioning carcasses for complete inspection of the outside of the birds. Mirrors are used behind the carcasses so the inspectors can view a whole bird without moving it. This procedure has proved as effective as traditional inspection methods, permits production lines to move faster, and requires fewer inspectors.

USDA has also proposed to modernize inspection of processed meat and poultry products, such as hot dogs and canned stew, through voluntary quality control. The system is more effective in consumer protection because it relies on laboratory analyses and recorded controls in addition to on-site inspection. Voluntary quality control would also permit the inspection program to take advantage of existing technology in the food processing field. ("Food News for Consumers," Jan. 1980, page 3.)

Taken together, the reforms will permit USDA to be more cost-effective in its inspection programs and will permit improvements in other areas such as residue detection and control, inspection of imported products, and more stringent inspection of problem plants.

For more information: Press Release #873-80 (4-25-80).

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## A Logo for FSQS



The logo at left will soon appear on the helmets of FSQS inspectors and graders and on agency publications, exhibits, and stationery. We at FSQS believe our new "check mark" symbol accurately depicts our role of providing assurance of safe and quality food to consumers through a wide range of programs.

In short, FSQS makes sure that food is okay. The shield (or badge) and check mark instantly communicate "acceptance," "approval," "safety." The combination of signs symbolizes both the safety and quality aspects of the mission of FSQS.

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## National Consumer Education Week

Need to brush up on buying skills? Want information on financial management? Your day is coming--for a full week.

President Carter has proclaimed that National Consumer Education Week will be observed the week beginning Oct. 5 and will provide consumers with the opportunity to learn about these and other subjects.

Joining in the nationwide effort will be schools, governments, consumer organizations, labor unions, and businesses. They'll be doing their best to bring consumers the information and knowledge they need.

For more information about National Consumer Education Week, contact the Public Participation Staff, FSQS, USDA, Room 1168-S, Washington, D.C. 20250.

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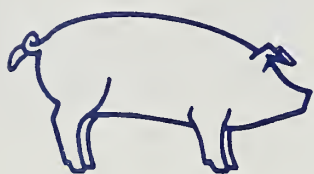
## **Enforcing the Laws**

The following are some recent actions taken by FSQS to protect the Nation's food supply.

### **contaminated poultry**

On May 23, Marshall Durbin and Co., Canton, Miss., voluntarily suspended slaughtering operations because the firm found illegal levels of the pesticide dieldrin in some lots of slaughtered broilers. USDA reviewed the plant's sampling plan for testing tissues to assure that birds with illegal levels of dieldrin were not going into consumer food channels. And, on May 29, USDA resumed inspection, and the plant reopened. Press Release #1136-80 (5-29-80).

### **contaminated pork**



A special sampling program for food prepared for the school lunch program found ground pork contaminated with the pesticides chlordane and heptachlor. Some of the pork may have been eaten by an unknown number of school children in 200 schools in Louisiana and Arkansas between April 5 and May 22. However, no health risks are posed by the limited exposure to the contaminated pork, and USDA is taking steps to trace the source of the contamination and to ensure that there is no further problem. More than 200 schools which may have received the product have been advised not to use it. USDA has intensified testing at the plant where the pork was processed, and pork known to be contaminated has been detained. Press Release #1111-80 (5-23-80).

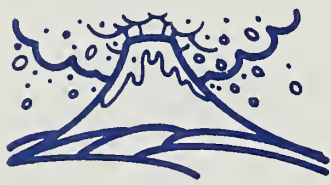
### **Kansas meat plant fined**

On Apr. 9, Foley Meats, Inc., Wichita, Kan., was fined \$2,000 after pleading guilty to violations of the Federal Meat Inspection Act. The violations, which occurred in November and December 1978, involved the unauthorized relabeling of beef patties containing partially defatted beef fatty tissue. The substituted labels did not list the ingredient. Beef patties with partially defatted beef fatty tissue are less costly than those made without this ingredient.

### **chronic problem plant in Massachusetts**

The Colonial Provision Co., Inc., a Boston, Mass., meat packing plant, has been identified as a "chronic problem plant." The firm was designated a chronic problem plant after three reviews by compliance officers showed operating conditions that could lead to an adulterated meat product. Intensified inspection coverage is being given to Colonial to assure that all products bearing the federal mark of inspection are in compliance with wholesomeness and labeling requirements of the Federal Meat Inspection Act. Press Release #794-80 (4-15-80).

### **effects of volcanic ash**



Fallout ash from the volcanic eruption of Mount St. Helens has created the possibility of contamination in meat, poultry, and egg products in Washington, northern Idaho, and western Montana. If contamination occurs, it would be from general plant sanitation and other mechanical problems. Production was temporarily stopped at some meat, poultry, and egg facilities to ensure that products were not exposed to the ash. Clogged engines, dusty roads, and sediment-filled rivers have also created major transportation difficulties in some areas, so production is still limited at some plants.

### **adulterated beef**

On May 20, Fulton Meat Market, Trenton, N.J., was fined \$4,000 after pleading guilty to selling 1,600 pounds of ground beef containing added water to schools in New Jersey during 1979.

### **mislabeled pork**

On May 20, Triolo Bros., Inc., Wrightstown, N.J., was fined \$1,000 for failing to label as inedible 2,500 pounds of pork lungs sold in 1975 to a New York manufacturer of pet food.



## More Canned Pork Purchased

USDA has purchased over 11 million pounds of canned pork since reopening its pork purchase program April 15. The canned pork is for use in schools during the 1980-81 school year. When the original pork purchase program ended in February, USDA had already purchased over 25 million pounds of canned pork.

The purchase program was reopened because pork slaughter was up about 20 percent over the comparable period in Spring 1979. The increased supply and resultant price decline presented an opportune time for USDA to purchase part of the red meats needed for this school year.

For more information: Press Release #803-80 (4-15-80).

## Other FSQS News



USDA to regulate meat inspection in Maine. Press Release #808-80 (4-17-80).

USDA adjusts retail sales exemption for meat, poultry. Press Release #875-80 (4-25-80).

USDA proposes changes in strawberry standards. Press Release #874-80 (4-25-80). Comments due Oct. 31.

USDA revises dry whey standards. Press Release #832-80 (4-21-80).

Maine potato diversion program announced. Press Release #983-80 (5-8-80).

USDA takes emergency action on DES violations. Press Release #843-80 (4-22-80). Also see "Food News for Consumers," May 1980, page 1.

USDA seeks comments on changes in shell egg grade standards. Press Release #1120-80 (5-28-80). Comments due Aug. 27.

## Agricultural Marketing Service

### USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service:

- Gathers and disseminates current information on prices, supplies, and other market data;
- Provides cotton and tobacco standardization, inspection, grading, classing, and testing services on request;
- Administers several regulatory programs designed to protect producers, handlers, and consumers from careless, deceptive, or fraudulent marketing practices;
- Administers marketing agreement and order programs to help establish and maintain the orderly marketing of milk, fruits, and vegetables;
- Provides patent protection to developers of certain novel plant varieties; and
- Monitors industry-sponsored and -financed research and promotion programs.

## Food Forecast for July

Several high-protein foods and fresh fruits will be in plentiful supply in retail stores during July, according to the monthly Food Marketing Alert issued by USDA. Marketing specialists expect unusually heavy supplies of pork, broiler-fryers, turkey, eggs, peaches, plums, nectarines, and limes.

## Food Forecast continued



Food Marketing Alert, a capsule forecast of expected food supplies, reports the following foods will also be plentiful during July: milk and dairy products; raisins and dried prunes; canned and frozen snap beans, carrots, and green peas; canned beets, sweet corn, sweet potatoes, spinach, and tomato concentrates; frozen lima beans, broccoli, and corn on the cob; peanuts; rice; and dry beans.

Foods expected to be in adequate supply--enough to meet normal needs--are beef; apricots; sweet cherries; oranges; lemons; citrus juices; potatoes; onions; canned lima beans, tomatoes, and tomato juice; frozen cut corn and spinach; and dry split peas.

Fresh Bartlett pears will be in light supply during July, with first shipments from the expected large crop coming toward the end of the month.

Monthly issues of Food Marketing Alert--along with special issues that cover certain foods that are in temporary oversupply in the marketplace--are distributed to the news media. Consumers should watch for this information in newspaper food pages, consumer broadcast programming, and Cooperative Extension Service bulletins.

USDA also distributes Food Marketing Alert to people who communicate with consumers, but not to individual consumers. For a sample copy and order blank, write: Information Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, Rm. 3620-S, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

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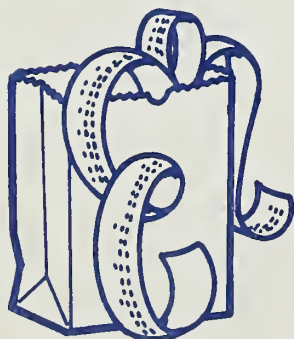
## Economics, Statistics, and Cooperatives Service

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### USDA's Economics, Statistics, and Cooperatives Service:

- Gathers and provides information on the agricultural economy;
- Analyzes international activities of agricultural significance;
- Does research on commodities, food and nutrition, cooperatives, natural resources, and rural development; and
- Furnishes timely and objective economic and statistical information to farmers and their cooperatives, other rural Americans, industries, consumers, and policy-makers.

## Consumers Are Paying Hidden Costs



Consumers are paying for more than just food at the supermarket. Over and above the cost of non-food items and the convenience of the parking lot closeby, one part of the bill that doesn't show up as an item on the register tape is the extra paid because competition in food manufacturing is among fewer firms, and the prices these companies charge are higher than if there were more competing.

In economists' terms, pure competition is diminishing, and oligopolies (when a few producers control the demand from many buyers) are becoming more prevalent in food manufacturing. One result, say USDA economists, is that this increasing concentration costs consumers. How much? From \$10 billion up to \$15 billion, and probably more today, since those figures were for 1975. Cost of this "monopolistic overcharge" per consumer that year was over \$55. On a happier note, studies show no overcharging in a big food component, meat-packing, with its large number of firms, low product differentiation, and low average profits.



## What the Essentials Cost



Shelter, food, and transportation are consumers' big-ticket spending items. Here's where much of the "average consumer's" disposable personal income (DPI) went in 1978 and 1979:

	<u>Dol.</u>	<u>1978</u> <u>% of DPI</u>	<u>Dol.</u>	<u>1979</u> <u>% of DPI</u>
Housing	1,883	28.2	2,119	28.5
Food	1,101	16.5	1,218	16.4
Transportation	875	13.1	965	13.0
Total DPI	6,672	100	7,426	100

Spending on food eaten away from home accounted for just over a fourth of the total food bill, which as a percentage of the DPI declined for the fifth straight year. Meanwhile, costs of housing and gas and oil took bigger shares. And, for the third straight year, a larger share went for transportation than for food at home, which averaged 12.3 percent of the DPI.

## An Even Meatier Diet for 1980



We're eating less beef but more pork and chicken, so meat consumption per person is headed for another record this year, after just setting one last year. Beef eating may drop 2 or 3 pounds, but pork will be in the plus column by 5 pounds and poultry by another pound or two following a 4.7 pound gain last year. As might be expected, the reasons trace back to what's happening in production this year. Predictions are for 9 percent more pork and 1 percent more broiler chicken than last year but 2 percent less beef. Accordingly, retail prices may be up 6 to 8 percent for beef, but down 3 to 5 percent for pork and about the same as last year for poultry.

## Getting Help to the Needy

Food stamps, anyone? No, not just anyone. Rather, on purpose and in fact, they are going mostly to people who need them most, a recent study shows. They provide the bulk of federal food assistance, which rose in the Nation's most needy counties from an average of \$22 per person in 1967 to \$154 in 1976. In the wealthiest counties, in contrast, assistance rose from about \$2 to \$26. Then in 1979, program changes brought in 3 million people, mainly those who hadn't enough cash to participate earlier. Poor people no longer had to put up some of their own money to get stamps. Result: Participation in the smallest, most rural areas of the country rose by 42 percent. It rose only 8 percent in the largest, most urban areas. Another indication: The changes also boosted numbers of elderly households getting food stamps by 32 percent, compared with a 14 percent rise by all other households.

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# Food and Nutrition Service

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USDA's Food and Nutrition Service administers:

- The food stamp program;
- The national school lunch and school breakfast programs;
- The special supplemental food program for women, infants, and children (WIC); and
- The food distribution, child care food, summer food service, special milk, and food service equipment assistance programs.

## Changes in School Lunch Meal Patterns



Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Carol Tucker Foreman recently announced final meal pattern rules for the national school lunch program. The rules are the second and final part of a major change in school lunch meal patterns proposed in 1977. The department implemented interim rules in August 1978 to field test the proposed changes and solicited public comment. These rules reflect findings about the impact of the meal pattern changes gathered during the test phase.

The rules recommend:

- schools serve different sized portions of food to children of different age groups. For instance, schools will have the option of providing smaller servings to younger children and offering larger portions to older students.
- residential child care institutions participating in the program serve two small meals that together provide the lunch pattern requirements to children aged 1 to 5. Department officials feel this is more in line with the eating habits of young children.

The rules also require schools to:

- increase the required servings of eggs and dry beans to make them nutritionally equivalent substitutes for meat and other meat alternates; and
- increase the number of bread servings required to provide children with higher levels of iron and other ingredients specified in the 1974 Recommended Dietary Allowances.



Under the school lunch program, meal patterns are used to ensure that lunches served across the Nation meet nutritional requirements. The approved pattern, formerly called Type A, includes meat or meat alternate, fruit and/or vegetable, bread or bread alternate, and milk. These requirements are reviewed periodically to reflect new knowledge about nutrition and children's eating habits.

For more information: write or call Michael McAteer, Public Information, FNS, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250. Phone: (202) 447-8077.



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# Science and Education Administration

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## USDA's Science and Education Administration:

- Plans and coordinates food and agriculture research, extension, and teaching efforts;
- Conducts federal research programs in the food and agricultural sciences;
- Communicates and demonstrates agricultural research results;
- Provides information and expertise needed by policy, regulatory, and action agencies of USDA and other federal departments; and
- Provides information systems and library services in the food and agricultural sciences.

## High Sugar Diets Bad for Some People



Individuals with a disorder called "carbohydrate sensitivity" should not eat high levels of sugar, according to USDA scientists. In research coordinated by Sheldon Keiser, chief of USDA's carbohydrate laboratory at Beltsville, Md., USDA scientists and University of Maryland researchers tested 24 volunteers who had been identified as carbohydrate sensitive. The 24 people ate diets with 5, 8, or 33 percent of total calories in the form of sucrose for six weeks.

Six of the volunteers when consuming the highest level of sugar (33 percent of calorie intake) developed a hyperlipoproteinemia pattern. In this condition, the blood carries amounts and kinds of fat that have been linked with heart disease.

It is estimated that 18 percent of calories in the average American diet are from sugar and other caloric sweeteners. Thirty-three percent is above average but may be about the level consumed by many individuals who like sweet foods and beverages.

## Human Milk Helps Babies Absorb Zinc

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A component in human milk has been discovered which may help breast fed babies absorb zinc.

The substance has been identified as picolinic acid by USDA biochemist Gary W. Evans and his co-workers at USDA's Human Nutrition Laboratory at Grand Forks, N.D.

The discovery of picolinic acid may also help medical scientists to understand acrodermatitis enteropathica (AE), a rare inherited disease which impedes zinc absorption and is sometimes fatal if not diagnosed and treated in time. The symptoms of the disease are diarrhea, rash, and hair loss. Evans says that breast feeding has long been recognized as beneficial therapy for infants with AE.

## Americans Eating Less But Still Getting Fat

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Americans are eating fewer calories and more nutritious diets, according to USDA's human nutrition researchers. This information is based on USDA's latest Nationwide Food Consumption Survey, the sixth in a series that began in 1935.

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## Americans Fat continued

Mark Hegsted, USDA's human nutrition administrator, states that although the total food consumption of Americans appears to be lower, they are still just as fat as they ever were and may be getting fatter.

"About the only interpretation of this finding possible would be that Americans are becoming increasingly sedentary," says Hegsted. "Indeed, there is essentially no evidence that those who are obese consume more food than those who are not obese."

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## Shocking News for Beef Eaters

Electrical stimulation of beef carcasses has a tenderizing effect on lower quality USDA grades of beef including USDA Standard, Good, and Utility grades, according to USDA researchers. It also permits the packer to "hot bone," or to cut up large portions of the carcasses, within two hours of electrical stimulation. This method of hot boning, made feasible by electrical stimulation, can save packers up to 35 percent in chilling costs and 20 to 30 percent in labor costs as compared to traditionally chilled and processed beef. USDA scientists say that ultimately the cost benefits could be passed on to consumers.

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## New Treat in Store for Melon-Lovers

A new type of melon prized in China for its sweet and crisp texture may be in American shopping baskets in a few years. The plant known as hami gua or honey melon is one of several new types of plants selected for U.S. development by a team of U.S. geneticists commissioned by USDA. The scientists visited Chinese communes and agricultural experiment stations to choose plants which may add nutritive values, disease resistance, and other desirable characteristics to American crops. These plants are now being tested for adaptability to U.S. soil.

E. V. Wann, USDA plant geneticist who headed the team, says the inside of the hami gua that he saw was yellowish orange but that some varieties are green inside or white.

"The Chinese told us they can store these honey melons as long as six months in a cool place. Maybe it's because this fruit has a tough rind," says Wann, who heads USDA's Vegetable Research Laboratory at Charleston, S.C.

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## Home Canning Procedures Found Questionable

Many American families are using questionable procedures to can foods at home. Findings published by USDA include:

- While most households use jars designed for home canning, one out of three households uses peanut butter, coffee, or other types of jars contrary to home canning recommendations by USDA.
- Most canners use two-piece lids with new flat metal disks. However, one in ten reuses some flat disks, contrary to USDA recommendations.
- The open-kettle method of canning, recommended only for jellies and as an initial step in preparing jams before water-bath processing, was used by about 6 out of 10 of those canning pickles. About 4 out of 10 canners used the open-kettle method for fruits, 4 out of 10 for vegetables, and about 3 out of 10 for tomatoes.





## Home Canning continued

- Most home canners seemed to be aware of signs of spoilage in canned foods --bulging lids, leaks, spurting liquid when the container is opened, off-odor, and mold.
- About a fourth of those surveyed reported spoilage in home canned fruits and vegetables. Although the survey, conducted in 1975, did not reveal the actual causes, three out of four households thought it was due to lids that failed to seal properly.

USDA officials stress the need for home canners to follow reliable instructions to reduce the risk of spoilage and to avoid illness. Such instructions are readily available at public libraries and from county extension offices.

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## Quick Cooking Brown Rice Developed



Quicker-cooking brown rice that can be prepared in a quarter of the time that it takes to cook regular brown rice has been developed by USDA scientists. Like regular brown rice, the new product is more nutritious than raw white rice. It contains 20 percent more protein than raw white rice, about 5 times the amount of thiamine, at least 8 times the amount of niacin, twice the amount of iron, and three times the amount of potassium.

The quicker-cooking brown rice was developed using a special high-velocity dryer which yielded porous precooked brown rice with quick cooking characteristics. It can be prepared in only about 10 to 14 minutes, as compared to the 50 to 60 minutes required for regular brown rice. The product is not yet being produced commercially.

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## Amaranths Can Provide Greens and Grain

Though not familiar to most Americans, amaranths are among the oldest crops in the New World and may be grown in a variety of climates. Taste panels have found that leaves of several species of the amaranth plant when used as a cooked vegetable have a spinach-like flavor. Raw amaranth leaves are nutritionally similar to raw spinach leaves, according to USDA's "Composition of Foods--Agricultural Handbook No. 8." USDA agronomist T. Austin Campbell of the Germplasm Resources Laboratory in Beltsville, Md., says that field tests show that certain varieties of amaranth would make excellent green crops and would help to "diversify our farming." The grain of the amaranth plant also contains "a significant quantity of high quality protein," reports chemist Robin Saunders, head of the cereals unit of USDA's Western Regional Research Center.

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## Publications from SEA

Copies of four Agricultural Handbooks which give the nutrient composition of major types of foods and a booklet on how to prepare protein-packed soybeans for extra mealtime benefits may be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

The handbooks, prepared by USDA scientists, are for use by nutritionists, dietitians, physicians, and others who need nutritional composition data. The booklet on cooking soybeans, which tells how soybeans can be converted to burgers, sausages, milk, flour, cheese, and even ice cream, is based on research by Hwa L. Wang, chemist with USDA's Northern Regional Research Center, and other USDA chemists and engineers.

SEA Publications  
continued

These publications are:

- Utilization Research Report No. 5, "Soybeans as Human Food--Unprocessed and Simply Processed," Stock No. 001-000-0357-1. \$2.40.
- Agricultural Handbook No. 8-4, "Composition of Foods--Fats and Oils--Raw, Processed, Prepared." \$4.75.
- Agricultural Handbook No. 8-1, "Composition of Foods--Dairy and Egg Products--Raw, Processed, Prepared." \$3.
- Agricultural Handbook No. 8-3, "Composition of Foods--Baby Foods--Raw, Processed, Prepared." \$5.



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## Highlights of this Issue

USDA's grade name policy may be changed (p. 1)  
New proposals made to further restrict PCB's (p. 2)  
Contaminated pork found in Arkansas and Louisiana (p. 6)  
High protein foods, fresh fruits plentiful in July (p. 7)  
Consumers paying hidden costs at supermarket (p. 8)  
New school lunch meal plans announced (p. 10)  
High sugar diets bad for some people (p. 11)  
Human milk helps babies absorb zinc (p. 11)  
Home canning methods questionable (p. 12)  
Quick cooking brown rice developed (p. 13)

